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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 003432

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SUBJECT: CONFESSIONS OF AN ANTI-MALIKI COR CONSPIRATOR

REF: BAGHDAD 3261 (COOKING UP NEW COALITION)

Classified By: Acting Political Counselor Rob Waller for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶11. (C) Summary: Prominent independent Shia CoR legislator Qassim Daoud told us October 10 that he is working overtime to build a coalition to oust and replace Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki. Claiming he was acting with the full support of Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani to save Iraq from "further tragedy and misery," Qassim said he is trying to broker and sell a Maliki ouster package that features current Vice President Adel Abdel Mehdi as replacement Prime Minister and former Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari as new Vice President (even though neither Adel nor Jaafari had expressly agreed to this arrangement). Qassim claimed the Iranian Ambassador told him that Tehran would continue to support Maliki in spite of his ineffectual leadership, and asked Qassim to travel to Iran to discuss any ouster plans. On key benchmark legislation prospects, he predicted the De-Baathification Law could be passed as early as mid-November but opined that lingering CoR anger over the Biden Amendment would prevent passage this year of the Provincial Powers bill. Qassim advised us to move early to gain support for a bilateral long-term strategic relationship agreement from Sunni parties and the Shia Fadhila Party, as their support would isolate certain Sadrists opposition to any arrangement that expressly permits an American presence in Iraq, the one thing the Sadrists believe could stymie their goal of total future domination of Iraq. End Summary.

Playing Kingmaker to Replace Despised Rival

¶12. (C) During a meeting held at his request, Qassim made no effort to mask his visceral contempt for Maliki and his government, repeatedly uttering words like "illiterate," "silly," and "stupid" to describe the PM and his policies. He said he has had no direct contact with Maliki since a tense meeting one month ago in which he claims to have accused the PM of "leading Iraq to tragedy and misery." Qassim quipped with a grim half-smile that he made sure prior to the meeting that his household electric generators were in working condition for fear that Maliki would order his grid electricity cut off after the meeting. He said that Maliki will now only accept input and advice from a six-person circle of Dawa Party loyalists, and his isolation has deluded him into mistaking his weakness for strength which in turn reinforced his natural inclination to act alone and in a capricious manner.

¶13. (C) Qassim provided an update on his plans to put together a coalition to oust Maliki and install a new government (reftel). He said he was working feverishly to broker an ouster package that would feature current Vice President Adel Abdel Mehdi as replacement Prime Minister and former Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari as new Vice President. Qassim explained that such an arrangement would enable him to build a "new" United Iraqi Alliance (UIA) since Adel's inclusion

would ensure the support of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraq (ISCI), and Jaafari would deliver not only the anti-Maliki wing of Dawa and Dawa Tanzim, but would also convince Fadhila and, most important, the Sadrists to return to the UIA fold. Qassim said the Sadrists and their 28 CoR seats were key to the success of this plan, and he is dangling the VP position as bait to Jaafari so that he will use his strong ties to the Sadrists to gain their support (even though Qassim faults Jaafari for bringing the Sadrists into the Ministry of Interior during his tenure as PM, a move for which Iraq "is still paying a high price.") To round out the anti-Maliki mix, Qassim would bring along independent Shia CoR members, and said he was deep in negotiations with the Sunni Tawafiq bloc, Ayad Allawi supporters, and Saleh al-Mutlaq's Hiwar Party over their participation. He claimed to have Grand Ayatollah Ali Sistani's full support in this undertaking and said Sistani told him he "would shed no tears" to see Maliki ousted or the UIA dissolved, as both have proved extremely disappointing. Qassim opined that Moqtada al-Sadr listens only to Sistani, and said that Sistani would weigh in with Moqtada about Maliki's ouster at an opportune time.

¶4. (C) Stating that he would pitch the Adel-Jaafari package deal to ISCI boss Abdel Aziz al-Hakeem at an October 10 meeting (the same day the ailing al-Hakim arrived from Iran for an Eid al-Fitr visit to Iraq), Qassim confided that he harbored reservations about Adel's qualifications for the PM position. He said that Adel is "far from an ideal candidate," alleging that he is "semi-secular" and slavishly obedient to al-Hakim's orders. Furthermore, he said the Sadrists do not like Adel and the Sunnis believe he is too close to Iran. As for Jaafari, he said the former Prime Minister did not immediately agree to the offer of the Vice

BAGHDAD 00003432 002 OF 002

Presidency, and Qassim opined that Jaafari still believes he can somehow muster support to serve once again as PM. Qassim ruled out this possibility, however, claiming that ISCI views Jaafari as "the devil" and, in any event, Sistani would intervene to enforce a promise Jaafari made to him to seek neither the PM nor the UIA leader position. Qassim recounted a recent visit to his home by the Iranian Ambassador, who told him Tehran realized Maliki is an ineffective leader but would continue to support him. He claimed the Iranian Ambassador told him that if he were intent on ousting Maliki, he should travel to Tehran to discuss the matter further. Qassim further claimed to have balked angrily at this suggestion, stating he told the Iranian he would not go to a foreign country to discuss internal Iraqi political matters.

Long-Term Strategic Relationship, Pending Legislation

¶5. (C) In reply to our question regarding current CoR attitudes about a long-term bilateral strategic relationship agreement, Qassim advised "as a friend of America" that we move early to gain support for such a plan from the Sunni Hiwar Party and Tawafiq bloc, and from the Shia Fadhila Party. If we line up the support of these potential opponents, we would thereby isolate certain Sadrist opposition to any arrangement that expressly permits an American presence in Iraq. The Sadrists want to dominate and rule Iraq, he intoned, and they believe a U.S. presence is the only thing that can keep them from this goal. As for key pending benchmark legislation, he predicted that the De-Baathification Law could be passed by a large CoR majority over Sadrist objection as early as mid-November. He said prospects for passage this year of the Provincial Powers Law appear bleak, opining that the recent Biden Amendment on federalism had soured the CoR mood on this draft bill.

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